

In brief

Shops told to withdraw promotions on analgesics: The UK Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency upheld two complaints against promotional offers, such as "two for the price of one" and "buy one get one free," in Tesco and Superdrug stores, it said. The offers could lead to stockpiling of medicines and undermined the government's restrictions on pack sizes of analgesics that aim to reduce misuse.

Dutch man with emphysema sues tobacco company: In the first case of its kind in the Netherlands, lawyers have issued a summons against British American Tobacco in a bid to establish responsibility for the health damage experienced by their client from smoking the company's cigarettes. The 67 year old man, who smoked from 1957 to 1983, has emphysema. The case, being heard in Amsterdam, is likely to last more than a year.

Measures against fraud in the NHS strengthened: The NHS Counter Fraud Service and the General Medical Council have agreed to share information relating to suspected fake and fraudulent doctors, as part of a more comprehensive memorandum of understanding.

Countries urged to share intelligence on bird flu: The World Health Organization is urging countries affected by avian influenza to share more information, research, and samples as the outbreaks in China and Vietnam seem to be developing in different ways. The outbreak is less pathogenic to humans in Vietnam and more virulent in birds in northwestern China.

Antibiotic eye drops available over the counter: The UK Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency has reclassified chloramphenicol eye drops, used to treat bacterial conjunctivitis, from a prescription only medicine. The move makes the eye drops the first antibiotic eye treatment in the United Kingdom that is available through pharmacies.

Article removed after US complains it could help terrorists

Owen Dyer London

A paper written for *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has been pulled from publication after US government officials described it as a "road map for terrorists" wanting to contaminate the United States' milk supply with biological agents.

The paper, authored by Lawrence Wein, a professor and bioterrorism expert at Stanford University, pointed out security weaknesses in the milk distribution network. He recommended that the Food and Drug Administration tighten its guidelines on surveillance in transit, begin testing milk for toxins, and improve pasteurisation techniques.

The article was published online in late May in a password protected area of the National Academy of Science website that

is normally used by journalists who wish to read papers before they are published. But when journalists called for comment, the FDA notified the federal government.

Stewart Simonson, assistant secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services, wrote to the president of the academy, Dr Bruce Alberts, complaining that the paper provided "very detailed information on vulnerability nodes" in the milk supply chain, and "includes very precise information on the dosage of botulinum toxin needed to contaminate the milk supply to kill or injure large numbers of people."

"It seems clear on its face that publication of this manuscript could have very serious public health and national security con-

sequences," Mr Simonson wrote.

The article has been removed from the academy's website. A spokesman for the academy, Bill Kearney, said, "We agreed to delay publication after some people from [the Department of] Health and Human Services came down and explained their point of view. We have yet to make a final decision on whether to publish at a later date." He added, "We've had security concerns crop up over our National Research Council work before, but never over an article contributed to [*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.]"

A spokesman for the Health and Human Services department, Marc Wolfson, said he believed that it was the first time his department had asked a journal to withhold a health science paper for national security reasons. "This was a voluntary decision, not censorship," he said. "If they had refused, we would have had no way to enforce it."

Red meat increases risk of colorectal cancer

Susan Mayor London

Eating red and processed meat increases the risk of people developing colorectal cancer, according to a European prospective study published this week (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 2005;97:906-16). The latest results from the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC) showed that the risk of developing bowel cancer was a third higher for people eating more than two portions a day of red and processed meat than for those eating less than one portion a week. The investigation was set up 10 years ago to research the dietary habits of European people.

The study prospectively followed up 478 040 men and women aged 25-70 years from 10 European countries. All were free of cancer at enrolment between 1992 and 1998. Information on diet and lifestyle was collected at baseline. A total of 1329 incident colorectal cancers



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Bowel cancer was higher in heavy consumers of red meat

were documented after a mean follow-up of 4.8 years.

The data showed that colorectal cancer risk was positively associated with eating red and processed meat. The risk was 35% higher in people eating the highest amounts of these foods (>160 g/day) compared with those eating the lowest amounts (<20 g/day) (hazard ratio 1.35, 95% confidence interval 0.96 to 1.88; P=0.03). The absolute risk of developing of colorectal cancer within 10 years for a study participant aged 50 years

was 1.71% for people eating the most red and processed meat and 1.28% for those with the lowest intake.

In contrast, the risk of colorectal cancer was inversely associated with eating fish. There was a risk reduction of nearly one third (31%) for people who consumed one portion or more of fish every other day (>80 g/day), compared with those who ate fish less than once a week (<10 g/day) (0.69, 0.54 to 0.88; P<0.001).